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ABSTRACT

A study of 28 high school journalists who had accepted the United States Army's invitation to visit Fort Knox was conducted to discover what their attitudes were toward military service, how those attitudes changed as a result of the tour, and how their attitudes were reflected in stories written upon returning from the trip. The students were given a pretest on attitudes toward military service and a posttest using the same items in a different order. Thirty student journalists who did not go on the trip were also given the test to establish a base line against which to compare those who did go. It was found that the group that went on the trip had pretest scores more favorable to military service than those who did not go. The posttest scores were only slightly higher than the pretest scores. Only eight stories were written and published after the trip. Of these, the favorable content overbalanced the neutral and unfavorable content but only by a slight amount. (TJ)

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HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISTS "VOLUNTEER" FOR TWO DAYS AT FORT KNOX: A PUBLIC RELATIONS CASE STUDY

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

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The trip wasn't exactly a freebie. In fact, the 28 Hoosier high school journalists who accepted the Army's invitation to tour Fort Knox were told to bring between $12 and $15 to cover the cost of meals. But the invitation did mean two days "free" from school and the chance to visit firsthand a basic training camp.

It was all part of N.W. Ayer's public relations effort to involve student newspaper editors in the Army's campaign to encourage enlistments. And this study is an effort to evaluate that public relations activity, to examine the attitudes of the students involved toward the Army and to analyze the stories produced by the student writers as a result of their excursion.

N.W. Ayer has had the Army account since 1966 when the allotment for recruitment advertising was $1 million. Today, 13 years later and six years after the shift from a mixed force of draftees and volunteers to an All-Volunteer Force, that budget has increased to $40 million; and ad agencies who bid for the 1979 account were told to assume a budget of $50 million.[1] N.W. Ayer was awarded the account.

The target audience for this massive campaign: The young men and women who are about to be graduated from the nation's high schools, those currently enrolled in college and recent high school graduates who are floundering in search of a career.

Critics of the All-Volunteer Army charge that it is too expensive, racially unbalanced, and uneven in quality.[2] William R. King, who took a year's leave of absence from his college position at the University of Pittsburg to study the All-Volunteer Army, recommended that the nation

consider alternatives to an all-volunteer force. He estimated the cost of obtaining a single recruit at $1,250.[3]

Through the volunteer Army, he said during testimony given to the Senate subcommittee on Armed Services Manpower and Personnel in March 1977, we "have been practicing a kind of economic conscription." His findings indicate that nearly one of every four recruits is black, twice that of the general population and nearly twice the percentage of blacks in the Army in 1970 (14%) when the draft was still in operation.[4]

One year later in 1978 the news offered some encouragement. A report issued May 9, 1978, by Defense Department manpower officials indicated that the number of high school graduates entering the Army was increasing. According to that report 65 percent of the men and women who enlisted in the Army during the first three months of 1978 were high school graduates compared with 48 percent during the same period in 1977.[5]

Currently (1979) Congressional committees are considering the resumption of the draft. A House Armed Services subcommittee overwhelmingly approved legislation on May 10 which would renew draft registration for all 18-year-old men at the end of the year. Rep. Richard C. White, D-Texas and chairman of the subcommittee on military personnel, summed up the mood of the subcommittee members this way: "There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the current inadequacy of the Selective Service System is a danger to this nation's security."[6]

Other Congressmen propose a national service program for both young men and young women as an alternative to the draft.[7]

While the debate continues on the political scene, N.W. Ayer is applying the $50 million in its Army advertising budget toward the development of effective messages and the selection of appropriate channels in its

effort to encourage enlistments.

This year's campaign focuses on the whole of the Army experience by spotlighting "people who've joined the Army." In one prime-time TV spot a recruit sings, "I think I'm going to get/ the education of my life/ and I think it's exactly what I need."

The message: that for some the Army will help to fill gaps in their education, for others it will enable them to afford a college education, for all it will offer the excitement of travel and the companionship of the "people who have joined the Army."

Even so, the Army announced in early July 1979 that it was lowering its recruiting standards and would again accept 17-year-old male volunteers who have not completed high school. This, bonuses and expanded educational benefits would be tried before the draft would be reinstated, according to Defense Secretary Harold Brown.[8]

A PR Plan with Publication Goals

In addition to advertisements on radio and TV, on billboards and in newspapers and magazines, what better way to reach its target audience with the Army's recruitment message than through the high school newspaper? It was the hope of Nelson Love, N.W. Ayer consultant to the Indianapolis District Recruiting Command, that once student editors learned about opportunities in the Army and toured a base, they would relay that information to their peers through a series of articles both in their student newspapers and in local professional media.[9] Similar tours in the past had produced encouraging results. A flying trip to Fort Sill in 1975 prompted a number of feature stories from the 15 student participants. One such story titled "I Wasn't Sure What To Expect" was reprinted in Recruiting and Career Counseling Journal, a magazine for Army recruiters.[10]

In preparation for this particular tour, Love and recruiting officers sent letters to selected principals inviting student editors from their schools to participate. Their goal was to enlist one school from each of the 25 recruiting stations in the state.

As a follow-up to the letters, Love talked with principals. If they were willing to excuse student journalists for the trip, he then approached the newspaper advisers seeking their cooperation.

Although they had hoped for the top editor from each paper, in most cases that editor was either unable or unwilling to go. When the bus departed for Fort Knox, it had on board 28 student journalists from 19 schools. Among them were 10 editors and an assortment of staff members ranging from photographer to ad salesman. Of the group 15 were females and 13 males.

An Invitation and an Opportunity to Study

The Hoosier tour of the Kentucky facility also offered these writers an opportunity to examine firsthand one public relations activity and to observe its effect upon the participants.

When Love called to invite us to accompany the group as combination chaperones and resource persons, we answered YES IF -- if we could use the experience as a case-study, examining any change in attitude toward the Army that might occur and analyzing the stories students wrote after having returned from the trip.

Both Love, who represented N.W. Ayer, and members of the Army recruiting team were enthusiastic about the project and anxious to cooperate.

We had three general research questions and were eager to check them out:

*What would be the attitude of the student participants toward military service?

We expected that since the participants had in a sense selected themselves into the program, they would be somewhat more favorable toward the Army and toward military service than would be student journalists who knew nothing about the trip.

*To what extent and in what direction would there be a shift in attitude as a result of exposure to information about the Army while on the tour?

We expected that exposure to information about the Army would lead to a positive shift in attitude but that it would be a small shift because of the short time involved.

*To what extent would attitudes be reflected in the stories that students wrote on their return from the tour?

We expected that student journalists, rather than being objective reporters, would write stories about the trip that would reflect their attitudes.

In addition we were interested in observing the student journalists in action. We wanted to know how and why they came to accept the assignment and what journalistic skills they would practice as they gathered information for their stories.

Study Design

Because the students who went on the trip were largely self-selected and not randomly chosen, the results of this case study should not be considered generalizable. However, it is instructive to use the trip as a case study to see how the subjects were treated and examine what effects, if any, the trip had on them.

Two different methods of measuring the effects of the trip were used.

The first measure was a 70-item Likert scale index of attitudes toward military service. This was administered on the bus after leaving Indianapolis and again on the bus shortly after leaving Ft. Knox. Thirty-four of the statements were reversed so that respondents were forced to use both ends of the scale ("strongly agree" and "strongly disagree"). The posttest included the identical statements but in a different order. The responses were tallied so that the least favorable responses received the highest scores. (strongly agree = 1, agree = 3, undecided = 5, disagree = 7, strongly disagree = 9) The range of scores possible on the index was 70 (strongly agree) to 630 (strongly disagree) with 350 the neutral or undecided point.

In using a scale like this, we were aware of several potential problems. Using a pretest to measure attitudes could be criticized as making the students more aware of the persuasive intent of the trip, thus enhancing attitude change, though some studies have also shown that a pretest can diminish change. Usually it has no effect, some communications researchers have concluded.[11]

Another problem is that of comparing these self-selected students with others who didn't go on the trip. To have a baseline of comparison, students from the publication staff at Bloomington High School South also took the pretest. No one from that school participated in the tour, nor knew about it. Although this could not function as a true control group (randomly selected), it does serve as a kind of baseline against which to compare those who went on the trip.

A final potential problem that was recognized was the possibility of the ceiling effect. If students chose to go because they were initially

favorable, the pretest scores might be so high that there would be little room for them to show any favorable shift in attitude.

The statements on the index were worded in short, easily readable sentences. Some concerned the kind and value of work performed in the military.("Military jobs are dull." "Servicemen and women are doing as much that is important in science as any other group.") Other statements commented on the kind of persons who are in the military and how they perform their jobs. ("I would recommend military service to my friends." "As a whole, military workers are second rate.")

The index was adapted from a test of attitudes toward working for the government.[12]

The reliability of the attitude scale was checked using a split-half reliability test on both the pretest and posttest scores. This test compares the odd and even items of the index. Because the reliability of a test increases with length, the split-half test underestimates the reliability of the entire test, and the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula was used to correct the score for the entire scale. In both cases, the adjusted reliability was .99, which means the scale was extremely consistent internally.

Part II of Study: Analysis of Stories

In addition to the pretest and posttest, a second measurement of student attitudes was used--the stories that students wrote about their trip. The analysis of these stories goes beyond attitude to behavior. Also, because the stories were written after the students returned home, the effects had a chance to wear off or to be heightened.

We did not seek to measure how many students enlisted in the military

or how the articles written might influence other students, choosing rather to focus on a narrower part of the communication process. Because several schools sent more than one student, the 28 students represented 19 schools, which limits the total possible number of school newspapers to 19. The time that elapsed between the trip and publication of the stories varied greatly, largely because of the publication schedules of schools with a monthly newspaper.

In choosing these two methods, we hoped to compare student attitudes before and after the trip and to see how favorable or unfavorable the stories resulting from the trip were.

The stories were subjected to the method of content analysis known as the coefficient of imbalance. This method tries to estimate the degree of imbalance (either favorable or unfavorable) in a story. Janis and Fadner, who designed this method, said it measured "the extent of differences in the ratios of favorable, neutral, and unfavorable material accorded the topic or symbol under analysis."[13] They said that this coefficient could be applied to any communication if it could be classified into categories of favorable or unfavorable content. The result is a single figure that shows the relationship between favorable and unfavorable material, ranging from +1 to -1, with "0" indicating neutral content.

In using the coefficient of imbalance, the coder must first decide the unit of analysis We used the sentence. Then, each sentence is classified in one of four categories: favorable, unfavorable, neutral, or not relevant.

Favorable sentences are those that place the Army or military service in a desirable position with high school students; those that make the Army sound appealing; those that associate the Army with socially approved objectives

or values; those that evaluate the Army or its position as worthwhile, promising, or propitious.

Unfavorable sentences are those that contain statements contrary to the favorable statements; those that place the Army or military service in an undesirable position with high school students; those that make the Army sound unappealing; those that associate the Army with socially rejected objectives or values; those that evaluate the Army or its position as worthless or unpromising.

A neutral sentence contains both favorable and unfavorable information, which cancel out each other.

Sentences were judged not relevant when they had neither favorable nor unfavorable assertions. Thus, the favorable, unfavorable, and neutral sentences equal the units of relevant content; that total and the nonrelevant units equal the number of units of total content. In this case, the units of total content should equal the number of sentences of the story.

After classifying the sentences in each story, the coefficient of imbalance is computed.[14] The statistic resulting will be expressed as a decimal between 0 and 1.0. For favorable statements it will be positive; for unfavorable statements it will be negative.

The problem of using the coefficient of imbalance with newswriting is that the density of favorable and unfavorable statements is likely to be low or can be neutralized by "getting both sides of the story." This problem is less severe in analyzing editorial writing where evaluations are commonly made.

Scores on the Attitude Scale

As a captive audience in the bus, the 28 students who went on the trip took both the pretrip and posttrip index of attitudes toward military

service. The former was given shortly after the bus left the recruiting center in Indianapolis, and the latter shortly after leaving Ft. Knox.

Although the students came from 19 different Indiana high schools scattered throughout the state, they displayed little variation. Twenty of the students said a parent had served in the military service, though many did not know which branch or when. Only four students said they had a brother or sister in the service.

Responses to the latter two questions gave the impression that the Army and military service were not something that family members had communicated about to students. Communication theory would predict that interpersonal communication would be the most forceful in altering or forming attitudes, and that these students had not used interpersonal communication within the family unit as a means of forming attitudes about the military.[15]

An informal chat with each student during the trip found that six of the thirteen males and three of the twelve females reported some interest in serving in a branch of the Armed Forces before taking the trip. Half the students said they were more interested in the service as a result of the trip, but that did not imply that they intended to enlist. A third of the students said they became less interested in the service as a result of the trip.

For the students who went on the trip, the pretrip index of 70 items received a mean score of 271.9, with a range of 219 to 380. The mean is almost halfway between "agree" (210 points) and "neutral" (350 points) on the scale. (See Table 1)

The group of journalism students who did not go to Ft. Knox contained 30 students, 14 males and 16 females. . There were more reporters and fewer editors than in the group that went to Ft. Knox. This group ranged from 190 to 443 on the attitudes toward military service index, with a mean

of 325.3, which is close to the neutral score of 350. A comparison of this mean with the pretest mean found a significant difference between students who went on the trip and students who didn't. (See Table 1)

Those who went to Ft. Knox were more favorable. Thus, the assumption in the first research question, that self-selection would produce a group initially more favorable, was supported.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The posttrip index received a mean score of 264.5, with a range of 176 to 382. Although this shows a movement of seven points closer to the favorable rating, the difference of before-trip and after-trip scores is obviously so minor that it is not substantial and could be attributed to no change in attitude or to chance.

It is also possible that a ceiling effect was encountered, so that students were as favorable as possible before the trip and had little room for favorable movement. Or, students may have had favorable attitudes with little knowledge on which to base their attitudes before the trip and sought information to support and reinforce their attitudes. In any case, the assumption of the second research question, that those who went on the trip would experience a positive shift in attitude, was not supported.

Content Analysis of the Stories

In the 90 days of school after the trip, eight stories appeared in local or high school newspapers about the trip. Two appeared in one high school newspaper, and one appeared in a local paper. In one story the student who went became a source interviewed by someone who did not go to Ft. Knox. On another story, a participant shared a by-line with a non-participant.

Of the stories written, the overall coefficient of imbalance was

favorable, .18, but not by a large amount. However, non-participants' stories had a coefficient of .04, which is about as neutral or balanced as possible. In comparison, the participants who wrote their own stories were more favorable, with a coefficient of .23.

Excluding one editorial, which had a coefficient of .54, the stories written by participants had a coefficient of .17, which is barely favorable. The range of coefficients on those stories was from -.06 to .35. (See Table 2) As a coder reliability check, we both coded all stories. The agreement was .95.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Among the seven participants who wrote stories about the trip those who changed most in attitude also showed a more favorable attitud toward the military on the content analysis index. Excluding the editorial, the three students who wrote the most favorable stories (coefficients of .35 and .31) also had, among the writers, the three most favorable after-trip scores on the attitude scale.

The relative favorableness of the after-trip scores and the stories written were compared using the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient, which found .76 or a strong positive relationship between the student's after-trip attitude and the story written.

Thus, the assumption of the third research question, that students would reflect their attitude in the copy they produced, rather than being objective reporters, seems to be supported. However, the grounds for support are tenuous because of the small number of cases and the possibility of intervening factors such as advisers or editors who chose not to run stories or to edit stories.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the attitude scale and the analysis of the stories,

though the limited number of cases make drawing conclusions difficult, seem to show that the student journalists faced three problems in their stories.

-First, they rarely used attribution, which could have made their stories appear more balanced.

-Second, they were vague in their purposes in visiting Ft. Knox and thus were not gathering information for a story or stories. They did not background themselves about the volunteer Army or about the function of Ft. Knox before going and didn't have an idea for a story.

-Finally, because of the infrequent publication schedule of some newspapers, the time lapse between the trip and the deadline for publication was long enough that students did not remember enough or feel the story was current enough to do a good job of writing or to be published. All these might be considered factors that inhibited students from writing balanced, accurate news stories, as only six of the 19 schools published articles in the 90 school days following the trip. Only one school placed an article in the local professional media, and that was in the high school news section of the paper.

Some Observations and Suggestions

A second, qualitative and more subjective review of the two-day excursion offers both concluding observations and companion suggestions.

The 28 student newspaper writers and editors seemed to have enjoyed the experience. They smiled through sleet and snow that discouraged older members of the tour group, climbed through tanks, grinned at the drill sergeant during a mock "command performance," and slushed agreeably through mud to get to the firing range. The only complaints were mild ones directed at the Army chow, a reminder of the food they left behind in the school cafeteria, and at the accommodations in World War II Army barracks with poor

heating and gang bathrooms.

But they weren't journalists in quest of a story. Notebooks were rare, and questions reflected personal concerns, not those of a perceived public waiting for a published story.

N.W. Ayer representative Nelson Love began to show his apprehension during the first afternoon. He reminded the student journalists of the information in their packets and suggested that they read a mimeographed sheet, which explained the rules of a writing contest about the Army.

Because we are journalism teachers by instinct, we organized an impromptu lesson on the art of questioning. And the next morning, we challenged the participants to find someone on the base from their hometown, preferably from their high school, to interview.

The gentle prodding paid off. Questions improved; and one young man found a recruit who had been his classmate just a few weeks before. (By the end of the school year, no story had appeared in the school paper about the new recruit.) In spite of these changes, the atmosphere was still that of students on an enjoyable field trip rather than that of working journalists on assignment.

In an effort to try to explain what we perceived to be a lack of journalistic initiative, we assigned ourselves the task of interviewing by telephone principals and advisers, both from schools that had sent representatives and from those that had chosen not to participate.

From principals who had been contacted by the Army but who decided not to involve student journalists in the project came two general complaints. Two principals objected because the event had not been submitted to their association of secondary school principals for approval. Others said they resented what they perceived to be an effort on the part of the Army to

get "us (the schools) to do their (the Army's) job for them." One principal was adamant: "Let them sell the Army on their own time."

Those principals interviewed whose students participated in the tour seemed to follow one of two courses of action. A few talked over the project with the newspaper adviser. Most said they simply passed the letter on to the adviser with their approval.

Newspaper advisers contacted after the tour were asked how they selected representatives and what, if any,conditions had been attached to the trip. The general pattern seemed to have been to ask the editor first and then to open the opportunity to anyone on staff. The result was that staff members who could afford the time away from classes and who were interested volunteered. In none of the schools contacted had there been any discussion of the possibility of newspaper stories that might evolve from the experience.

High school newspaper editors are logical links between their readers and information about the Armed Services that those students should know. Military officials, for a number of years, have invited school administrators, department chairmen and guidance officials on educational tours of military bases. The extension of those invitations to student editors is a recognition of the value of the student newspaper.

Army personnel interested in sponsoring future scholastic tours probably should first contact the associations of high school principals in their district commands to gain understanding for the program and to earn approval. A spot on the program at state and national conventions of school administrators, participation on panel discussions at faculty meetings--such activities would help school personnel to understand the All-Volunteer Army and to recognize the implications for their students.

The selection process for determining which student journalists should accept the "assignment" could be clarified. The advisers and editors involved in this tour gave little indication that they recognized the news value of the tour.

It would seem, too, that student editors and advisers need more information before the student's departure on the tour. The majority of the students on this particular trip had no sense of the history of the All-Volunteer Army. Their knowledge of the war in Vietnam came from history books or a teacher's lecture.

Background information or a list of topics to be researched would send them to the library and put them in an inquisitive mood. The informational packet distributed to students on the bus could easily have been transformed into a Press Kit containing informative background material, lists of story ideas and a picture or two of the installation to be visited. Such a kit in the hands of the editor a few days before the tour would encourage a more professional attitude on the part of the participants.

The Army--who should be included and how should it be maintained? The issue does affect students currently enrolled in high school. Its news value justifies serious inquiry on the part of student journalists in search of stories and deserves the attention of those who represent the Army.

Footnotes

1. Richard Gordon, "Army Account to Draw Agency Bid Blitzkrieg," Advertising Age 49 (February 27, 1978), p. 92.

2. Robert Manning, "Voluntary Army in Review," Atlantic Monthly 240 (December 1977), p. 6.

3. The All-Volunteer Armed Force. Hearing March 2, 1977, before the Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel of the Committee on Armed Services of the U.S. Senate, 95th Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 6.

4. Ibid.

5. Reported by Fred S. Hoffman of the Associated Press on May 10, 1978.

6. Associated Press story distributed May 11, 1979.

7. UPI story distributed May 21, 1979.

8. Associated Press story distributed July 7, 1979.

9. Telephone interview with Nelson Love.

10. Recruiting and Career Counseling Journal 28 (September 1975), p. 27.

11. William J. McGuire, "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change," in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds.), Handbook of Social Psychology (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1968), vol. 3, p. 184.

12. Barbara Aalto, "A Scale Measuring Attitudes Toward Working for the Government," Journal of Applied Psychology 40 (1956) pp. 398-402.

13. Harold Lasswell et al. (eds.), Language of Politics (South Norwalk, Conn.: George W. Stewart, 1949), p. 97.

14. When favorable statements are more common than unfavorable ones, the formula is $C_f = \frac{f^2 - fu.}{rt}$ When unfavorable statements are more common than favorable ones, the formula is $C_u = \frac{fu - u^2}{rt}$. The formula is explained in Richard W. Budd et al., Content Analysis of Communications (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 56.

Footnotes
(continued)

15. Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Theories of Mass Communication (New York: David McKay, 1975), pp. 211-2.

Table 1

Means on Scale of Attitudes Toward Military Service
of Participants and Non-Participants

	N	Mean	
Non-participants	30	325.3	significant difference (to the .01 level, as measured by both the t-test and the Mann-Whitney U test)[a]
(range 190 to 443)			
Before Trip	28	271.9	
(range 219 to 380)			no significant difference
After trip	28	264.5	
(range 176 to 382)			

Lower scores indicate a more favorable attitude.
"Strongly agree" = 70; "agree" = 210; "neutral" = 350.

[a] $t=-4.31$, $df=57$, $p<.01$
$z=3.9$, $n=58$, $p<.01$

Table 2

A Comparison of the Coefficient of Imbalance of Student-Written Stories with Before and After Trip Scores on the Attitude Toward Military Service Index

Writer of Article	Coefficient of Imbalance	Before-Trip Index	After-Trip Index
Woods (editorial)	.54	224	250
Hill	.35	244	176
Fowler and White	.31	292 280	180 234
Thomas	.12	276	252
Claxton 1	.12	308	312
Claxton 2	-.06	(308)	(312)
Etnier and Helper (non-participant)	.07 .00	258 ---	267 ---
Lynch (non-participant)	.00	---	---
All articles	.18		
All participants	.23		
All participants, excluding editorial	.17		
All nonparticipants (includes Etnier)	.04		

Correlation of before and after-trip scores for writers: .32

Correlation of after-trip scores and coefficient of imbalanace: .76